

§ 3431.4

expenses are reasonable, these expenses will qualify for repayment.

Service agreement means the agreement, which is signed by an applicant and the Secretary for the VMLRP wherein the applicant agrees to accept repayment of qualifying educational loans and to serve in accordance with the provisions of NVMSA for a prescribed period of obligated service.

Termination means a waiver of the service obligation granted by the Secretary when compliance by the participant is impossible, would involve extreme hardship, or where enforcement with respect to the individual would be unconscionable (see breach of agreement).

Withdrawal means a request by a participant for withdrawal from participation in the VMLRP after signing the service agreement, but prior to VMLRP making the first quarterly payment on behalf of the participant. A withdrawal is without penalty to the participant and without obligation to the Program.

§ 3431.4 Solicitation of stakeholder input.

The Secretary will solicit stakeholder input on the process and procedures used to designate veterinarian shortage situations prior to the publication of the solicitation for nomination of veterinarian shortage situations. A notice may be published in the FEDERAL REGISTER, on the Agency's Web site, or other appropriate format or forum. This request for stakeholder input may include the solicitation of input on the administration of VMLRP and its impact on meeting critical veterinarian shortage situations. All comments will be made available and accessible to the public.

§ 3431.5 Solicitation of veterinarian shortage situations.

(a) *General.* The Secretary will follow the procedures described in this part to solicit veterinarian shortage situations as the term is defined in § 3431.3.

(b) *Solicitation.* The Secretary will publish a solicitation for nomination of veterinarian shortage situations in the FEDERAL REGISTER, on the Agency's Web site, or other appropriate format or forum.

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(c) *Frequency.* Contingent on the availability of funds, the Secretary will normally publish a solicitation on an annual basis. However, the Secretary reserves the right to solicit veterinarian shortage situations every two or three years, as appropriate.

(d) *Content.* The solicitation will describe the nomination process, the review criteria and process, and include the form used to submit a nomination. The solicitation may specify the maximum number of nominations that may be submitted by each State animal health official.

(e) *Nominations.* Nominations shall identify the veterinarian shortage situation and address the criteria in the nomination form which may include the objectives of the position, the activities of the position, and the risk posed if the position is not secured.

(f) *Nominating Official.* The State animal health official in each State is the person responsible for submitting and certifying veterinarian shortage situations within the State to NIFA officials. It is strongly recommended that the State animal health official of each State involve the leading health animal experts in the State in the nomination process.

§ 3431.6 Review of nominations.

(a) *Peer panel.* State shortage situations nominations will be evaluated by a peer panel of experts in animal health convened by the Secretary. The panel will evaluate nominations according to the criteria identified in the solicitation. The panel will consider the objectives and activities of the veterinarian position in the veterinary service shortage situation and the risks associated with not securing or retaining the position and make a recommendation regarding each nomination.

(b) *Agency review.* The Secretary will evaluate the recommendations of the peer panel and designate shortage situations for the VMLRP.

§ 3431.7 Notification and use of designated veterinarian shortage situations.

The Secretary will publish the designated veterinarian shortage situations on the Agency's Web site and will

use the designated veterinarian shortage situations to solicit VMLRP loan repayment applications from individual veterinarians in accordance with subpart B of this part.

Subpart B—Administration of the Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program

§ 3431.8 Purpose and scope.

(a) *Purpose.* The regulations of this subpart apply to the award of veterinary medicine loan repayments under the Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program (VMLRP) authorized by the National Veterinary Medicine Service Act, 7 U.S.C. 3151a.

(b) *Scope.* Under the VMLRP, the Secretary enters into service agreements with veterinarians to pay principal and interest on education loans of veterinarians who agree to work in veterinary shortage situations for a prescribed period of time. In addition, program participants may enter into an agreement to provide services to the Federal government in emergency situations in exchange for salary, travel, per diem expenses, and additional amounts of loan repayment assistance. The purpose of the program is to assure an adequate supply of trained food animal veterinarians in shortage situations and provide USDA with a pool of veterinary specialists to assist in the control and eradication of animal disease outbreaks.

§ 3431.9 Eligibility to apply.

(a) *General.* To be eligible to apply to the VMLRP an applicant must:

(1) Have a degree of Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM), or the equivalent, from a college of veterinary medicine accredited by the AVMA Council on Education;

(2) Have qualifying educational loan debt as defined in § 3431.3;

(3) Secure an offer of employment or establish and/or maintain a practice in a veterinary shortage situation, as determined by the Secretary in accordance with the procedures in subpart A of this part, within the time period specified in the VMLRP service agreement offer; and

(4) Provide certifications and verifications in accordance with § 3431.16.

(b) *Non-eligibility.* The following individuals are ineligible to apply to the VMLRP:

(1) An individual who owes an obligation for veterinary service to the Federal government, a State, or other entity under an agreement with such Federal, State, or other entity are ineligible for the VMLRP unless such obligation will be completely satisfied prior to the beginning of service under the VMLRP;

(2) An individual who has a Federal judgment lien against his/her property arising from Federal debt; and

(3) An individual who has total qualified debt that does not meet the debt threshold.

§ 3431.10 Eligibility to participate.

To be eligible to participate in the VMLRP, a participant must meet the following criteria:

(a) Meet the eligibility criteria of § 3431.9 for applying to the VMLRP;

(b) Be selected for participation by the Secretary pursuant to § 3431.12.

(c) Comply with all State and local regulations (including appropriate licensure where required) in the jurisdiction in which he or she proposes to practice;

(d) Be a citizen, national, or permanent resident of the United States;

(e) Sign a service agreement to provide veterinary services in one of the veterinarian shortage situations; and

(f) Comply with the terms and conditions of the Service Agreement.

§ 3431.11 Application.

Individuals who meet the eligibility criteria of § 3431.9 may submit an online program application or any other application process provided by the Secretary.

§ 3431.12 Selection of applicants.

(a) *Review of applications.* Upon receipt, applications for the VMLRP will be reviewed for eligibility and completeness by the appropriate staff as determined by the Secretary. Incomplete or ineligible applications will not be processed or reviewed.